



Congo Peacock *Afropavo congenis* photographed in Zaïre (Norbert Röttcher/Alan Root)
Paon du Congo Afropavo congenis photographié au Zaïre (Norbert Röttcher/Alan Root)



Photospot: Congo Peacock *Afropavo congensis*

by John H. Fanshawe

For birders intent on seeing a really difficult species, Congo Peacock gets close to the top of the list. It is possibly reasonably widespread in deep equatorial rainforest in eastern and central Zaire, but that does not make it any easier to find! Alan Root's rediscovery of this magical and elusive bird had all the makings of a film-plot with flights in a light plane, clearing remote air strips and long hazardous motorcycle journeys. Then, deep in wonderful forest, the moment we all long for, the sight of a rare, beautiful, bewitching bird, a really thrilling climax to the tale. Yet Alan's description of the search and the male bird he spotted, scuttling away, head low, gives an inkling of the difficulties that surround finding this shy, secretive bird, even in ideal habitat.

The original scientific discovery of Congo Peacock was no less extraordinary. The first evidence came in 1913 when JP

Chapin encountered a hunter near Ituri who had a peacock feather in his hat! Clearly, the bird was well known to people locally and presumably remained so, but it was not until 1936 that Chapin found two mounted specimens in a cabinet at the Brussels Museum. Ironically, they had been collected just a year after his Akavubi encounter, but had languished misidentified as Blue Peacock *Pavo cristatus* for the intervening 20 years.

Congo Peacocks have been kept in captivity since the early 1940s, and the first birds taken overseas went to the New York Zoological Society in 1949. Their behaviour is not well-known, but they are clearly forest-floor dwellers, only moving into trees to roost, or if they are chased by hunters and their dogs. Small groups of two or three birds appear to live together and wander the forest, often covering long distances, grubbing up a varied diet

of insects and fruits. They are apparently fond of foraging below fruiting trees. Apart from forest clearance, the main threat to the peacock is probably hunting (formerly including for zoos). Let's hope that the growing interest in their survival, which includes new surveys being undertaken by Dieudonné Upoki and John Hart of The Wildlife Conservation Society in the Haut Zaire region, brings good news of the peacock populations that must still remain at large in some of Central Africa's most beguiling forests. ☺

Acknowledgements

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Photospot: Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex*

by John H. Fanshawe

Shoebill may be easier to find than Congo Peacock *Afropavo congensis*, but the young bird that frequented the Maasai Mara in Kenya for several months late last year ended a long and at times eccentric hunt for the species in Kenya¹. For many years, people had assumed this remarkable bird would be found in the papyrus stands of the Yala Swamp on the Kenyan shores of Lake Victoria². Then, a photograph taken from the air confirmed as much. Onto the list went Shoebill! It was not to stay, however, for, with inimitable sangfroid, the sighting's originator, Ian Parker, kindly put the record straight. In such style, moreover, that he deserves citing here: "... during aerial survey work along the Albert Nile in Uganda, I and a colleague photographed a Shoebill. After returning to Nairobi, we were asked by Forbes-Watson [Alec F-W, then Curator of Birds at the National Museums] if we had examined the grounds about the Yala

Swamp. 'Yes' said I, and handed over the photograph as Kenya's first authentic record of the species. The leg-pull was to have been revealed later that day but, with a more than usually convivial lunch intervening, it was not. And so 'Yala Swamp' slipped formally into the Kenya record as the only locality for this species. I now formally remove it. *Mea culpa!*'³. Stern spirits would no doubt complain that Kenya Breweries should have less to do with the comings and goings of the Kenya list, but, now that the Musiara Marsh has yielded that magical bird, we can simply enjoy the history of a record made good.

David Cottridge's fine picture was taken in November, but the sub-adult Shoebill first appeared in the Mara on September 19 last year. It stayed for two months before moving further east to Amboseli, where it was last seen on December 15. Perhaps it has now found its way to a real Shoebill site, the

extensive wetlands of the Moyowosi Swamp complex in Central Tanzania for example: I hope so. ☺

References

1. Lewis, A.D. and Pomeroy, D. 1989. *A Bird Atlas of Kenya*. Rotterdam: Balkema.
2. Britton, P.L. 1978. Seasonality, density and diversity of birds of a papyrus swamp in Western Kenya. *Ibis* 120: 450-466.
3. Parker, I.S.C. 1984. Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex*: a deletion from the Kenya avifauna. *Scopus* 8: 79.

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David Cottridge's photograph of the Shoebill in the Maasai Mara, taken in November 1994, appears on the back cover of this bulletin